RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Quarterly

VOLUME XXV No. 3 1995

Mill Village Memories



MOULTON

Quarterly author Donald Russell enjoys a long, cool drink of water as a youngster in 1909. He stands atop the Mill Village community spring. The building in the background housed the blacksmith and wagon maker. (#14 on map)

About the Author and Mill Village

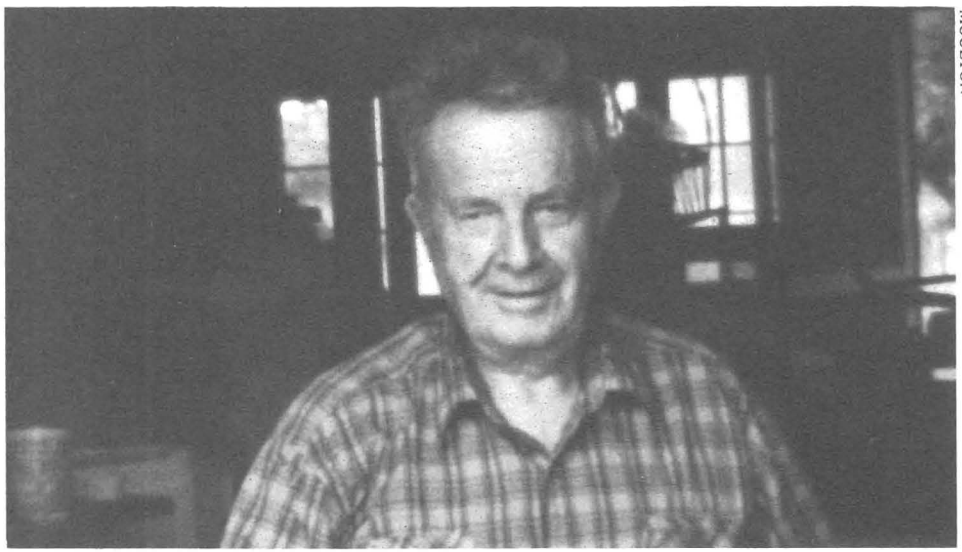
The following memories of a boyhood in Mill Village were written recently by Donald Russell, a lifelong resident of Rutland Town. He is now 86 years of age.

The Russell family came to Mill Village from Ferrisburgh, VT, when George Russell (Donald's grandfather) bought Glen Mills. Donald, and his father Ray before him, operated a retail milk business in Rutland City from 1888–1982. Donald also delivered milk and mail for many years in Chittenden. He was, in effect, the last driver of the Chittenden Stage.

Donald now lives in retirement with his wife Olive on the farm they purchased in 1944 on the Chittenden Road in Rutland Town. The Russells have four children: Stephen, whose farmland abuts their own, Nancy Garcia of Charlton, MA, Linda Lunna of Stockbridge and Faye Moulton of Rutland.

Mill Village is an area just north of the Rutland City/Rutland Town line. It begins at the point where Lincoln Avenue joins Route 7 and extends north to the junction of Chittenden Road and Route 7 near the Central Vermont Public Service Corporation power station (Glen Station).

The area encompasses approximately five of the original Rights of Rutland Township which was chartered in 1761 by Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire. In 1773 Joshua Reynolds bought a portion of this land and erected a saw mill and grist mill on East Creek. The mills, which were located south of the bridge on what is now McKinley Avenue (once known as Tater Lane), attracted a settlement which became known as Mill Village.



MOULTON

Donald V. Russell

A descriptive area map is on pages 54–55.

Mill Village Memories

by Donald V. Russell

Circa 1918–1920, Mill Village, a tiny hamlet located on the gravel road to Burlington about two miles north of Rutland City, was the center of our universe. World War I was over, the world was "safe for democracy" and the United States was an island inaccessible to any future enemy. Our hamlet which was surrounded by miles of farm and forest land, none of it posted, none of it developed, was our playground.

When my father moved from Ferrisburgh to Mill Village in 1872, the family moved into the "mill house" (#7 on the map). My grandfather had taken over the operation of the saw and grist mills that sparked the name "Mill Village", at that time called "the Glen" and previous to that, "Sheepskin".

Many times my father recalled his first impression upon arriving in Mill Village. As an already-homesick seven-year-old, he felt that this was the most forlorn and desolate place in the world. Located on the east side of Route 7 at the junction of McKinley Avenue was a weather-beaten unpainted house (#3 on the map) of late 1700s vintage. Little did he realize that this would become home to six generations of the Russell family.



MOULTON

The Russell Home
(#3 on the map)

Sources of Water

Just across the road from home a "boiling" spring provided the only source of pure water for the entire settlement. An iron cylinder about three feet in diameter was set several feet into the ground allowing the spring to boil dead center in the bottom. The cylinder extended above ground about four feet and had a wooden cover. A hand-operated lever opened a valve which released water through an iron pipe on the side. Opposite this, and on a higher level, an overflow pipe emptied into a circular iron horse trough. Upon raising the hinged cover of the main spring one could peer into the crystal-clear depths and see mounds of bubbling sand in constant turbulence caused by the jets of water seeking their own level. At all times a battered tin cup rested on the cover, available to anyone. Any thought of sanitation was over-shadowed by the desire to quench thirst. A cloud of steam rising high in the air often betrayed the plight of some hapless motorist stopped to attend to an over-heated radiator.

A short way up the Post Road, on the south roadside, a small boxed-in spring carried the infamous name "The Alcohol Spring". Here, far from human eyes and the Volstead Act [enforcement arm of the Prohibition Amendment], disciples of Bacchus "cut" their deadly and illegal alcohol.

Another source of household water was the cistern in the cellar where rain water was conducted through a series of pipes. If a house had no cistern, then that object of sentiment and song, the rain barrel, had to suffice.

In the early 1900s a Mr. Beayon from Castleton arrived with a drilling machine and spent an entire summer drilling wells for most of the local homes. Each home "roomed and boarded" the crew during the process. Many of these wells are still in use, now connected to electric pumps to assure plenty of water with good pressure.

The Blacksmith Shop

(#14 on the map)

The combined blacksmith and wheelwright shops operated by Fred Provo and Henry Bolduc on the west side of the road, with the spring in their front yard, were the nerve center of the hamlet. The smith, Fred, was very tolerant, and my brother Lawrence and I spent many hours watching red-hot shoes being fitted to horses' hooves skillfully pared down for a perfect fit. A pungent smoke from this procedure, mixed with the aroma of horse and black coal smoke, calls up a nostalgia never to be forgotten.

There were kegs of horse-shoe nails (bend one just right and you had a finger ring), long flat bands of steel for wagon tires, and a bench or chairs for customers' use. Rainy and extremely hot days were the busiest. There was the forge with its hand-operated bellows, and anvil ever-ringing with the sound of steel against steel. A barrel of water stood ready to temper the iron. Just outside the door a pile of hoof parings, horse manure and ash accumulated and was removed as often as necessary. A pile of cast-off shoes took the shape of a haystack.



RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This building, which housed blacksmith Fred Provo and wagon maker Henry Bolduc, stood on the west side of Route 7 near East Creek. Living quarters were upstairs (#14 on the map).

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Nearly every male in Mill Village sooner or later adopted a pair of these shoes for his personal use, and summer evenings after supper old and young would gather by the shops and games of "horseshoe" would ensue. I recall that Henry Bolduc had a pair of pony shoes painted white and many times after the dust of combat had settled these shoes would be settled snugly against or around the post, thus eliminating any chance of argument.

There were also discarded steel wagon tires which we rolled for countless miles through the pristine, traffic-free countryside often utilizing an old wagon wheel spoke as a stick.

If the smithy thought that we had been around long enough he would spit on his hammer and strike a resounding blow on a piece of white-hot iron resulting in a loud explosion (entirely unexpected) which headed us out of the shop at top speed. This worked on dogs too.

Rumor had it that Fred could bend over and touch his elbows to the floor without bending a knee. When his only daughter grew up and married, he had reached a point where money was no problem. One day, working alone in his shop, he suddenly threw down his hammer, slipped out of his apron and said to himself, "I'm done!". He spent his winters in Florida and had a summer camp on East Pittsford Pond (now a wooded area) opposite Teenie's Tiny Poultry Farm. He lived about ten years in retirement. His house was the next house south of our home and no one could ask for a better neighbor.

The Wagon Shop

(#14 on the map)

The wagon shop occupied the lower half of the east side of the blacksmith building. The upper story contained the paint shop on the west and Henry Bolduc's living quarters on the east. Mr. Bolduc was a perfect example of the transplanted French Canadian. He had served his apprenticeship in a shop in Quebec working unbelieveable hours to learn his trade, but he certainly learned it well.

The fresh smell of newly-worked hardwood permeated the shop's interior. All wagon spokes were hand-shaved and chiseled. There were no electric motors to speed the work. I have seen him take a newly painted wheel; spin it on an axle; apply a stripe with a small brush and where the stripe met no eye could detect. He also drew flowers on the fancier vehicles. With Fred Provo doing the iron work and Henry the woodwork, a most efficient team evolved.

Henry's small annual Fourth of July celebration was to stand on his upper porch and fire one salute from an ancient, double-barreled shotgun: his "two pipe gun".

He had one son, "Little Henry". I shall never forget the day that he came up to bid us goodbye as he was leaving for World War I. Everyone was in tears. He never came back, joining two more of our local boys, Earl Perkins and Kenneth Elmore, in making the supreme sacrifice for country.

Old Henry used to tell us of skating nights on the St. Lawrence River with his brother. One night, out of earshot of any possible help, they broke through

the ice. They took their wet scarves, let them freeze on the ice and managed to pull themselves out. Henry eventually retired to his native city of Quebec and died there on April 25, 1929.

The Bridge

McKinley Avenue crossed the pond through a covered bridge; a tunnel of fear for the young fry to run through (on a dare) at night; a place of wonderment each June when strangers as foreign to us as a visitor from Mars appeared and posted lurid signs inside announcing the arrival of "The World's Largest Circus". The only graffiti consisted of jackknife-carved initials—some modern, some ancestral.

The Cove and Trout Holes

Near the present Hendee garage, an ancient riverbed that had filled with the birth of the pond was known as "The Cove". It was a safe place to skate and a home for white water lilies transplanted from Little Otter Creek in Ferrisburgh by my caring father. Upriver from the pond were a few famous trout holes (namely the Davis, Burke, Lester and Sargent) each inhabited by legendary trout too large for any line to hold.

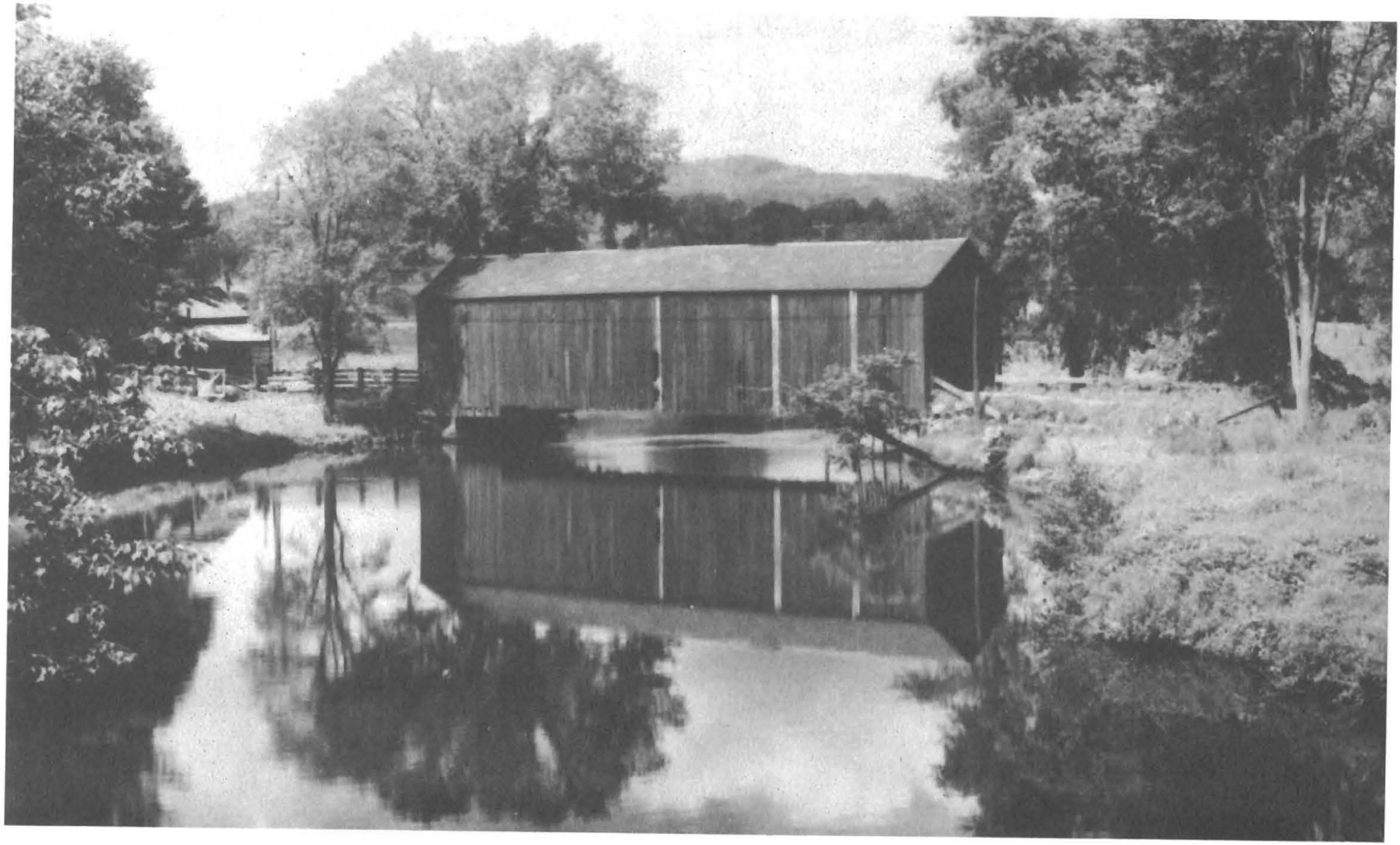
One annual spring event was the arrival of the "fish hawk"—no doubt an osprey. If we watched him wheeling majestically, white-bellied in the blue spring sky, we might be rewarded by a spectacular dive and great splash. Each trout hole was also an "Ole Swimmin' Hole" where we skinny-dipped with no qualms.

The Marsh

Bounded on the west by Route 7, on the north by Post Road and on the east and south by the farmland of Rutherford Fintell, the marsh created from backwaters of the main pond furnished countless hours of entertainment. Here the red-winged blackbirds were one of the first harbingers of spring. On a soft April evening the first frog would peep, followed later by the trill of toads, and finally, the hoarse bellowing of bull frogs.

With our homemade raft, at times we could pole as far as the Post Road. Occasionally we were awed by the presence of a great blue heron or the lesser bittern. The marsh provided a skating rink in winter and a trapping ground during fur season. No tickets had to be bought and no dues paid. All was furnished free by Mother Nature. Sweet flag and iris attracted enough muskrats so that each fall several of their domed huts appeared among the bullrushes.

The Post Road running easterly along the north end of the marsh was our favorite butterfly hunting site as we collected specimens to be framed or placed in the glassed trays woven by our mother. We also collected worms and fed them until they spun cocoons. Many of them were kept in the house and hatched in mid-winter. These included: Cecropia, Polyphemus and Promethia. During the winter we took long trips on foot, ski or snowshoe searching for more cocoons for future exhibition at the Rutland Fair.



BREHMER

The covered bridge spanning East Creek was constructed by Nicholas Powers. It was swept away in the 1947 Flood.

The Glen

Water from the mill dam spilled over into its own famous trout hole and then proceeded in a curve through a small gorge known as "The Glen"; hence the name "Glen Mills". A path led from the mill to the bottom of the glen where a spring bubbled out of the ledge at stream side. A cul-de-sac of unspoiled beauty unfolded with a small island in the middle: cool in the hottest days of summer with maidenhair ferns growing among the hemlocks.

The creek broke westward out of the glen; into open pasture land to the north; through meadows on the south (now North Street); then entered a small gorge just above the "76" covered bridge, now the site of Patch's dam. In this small gorge, over the centuries, the water had eroded a small cave known as the "Devil's Camp". All of this area, now the Country Grove development, was completely wooded.

F. R. Patch built the dam and power station in 1921 to generate electricity. This flooded water back to the Glen Mills dam and raised the old mill pond by six inches. The first day the gates were closed my father, brother Lawrence and I took a good vantage point expecting to see a lot of wildlife seeking asylum on dry land. We saw one garter snake.

When Patch Pond filled, the water was nearly flush with the floor of the old mill. After this the Glen Mill was used only to store grain. A few years later (1925) Lawrence and I were playing with a baseball just south of home when we heard a noise like a huge sigh followed by a rending crash. Looking toward the mill we saw a pillar of white flour-like dust. The water had so weakened the foundations that the whole mill collapsed into the pond. As the water surged in, the air rushed out carrying fine clouds of dust with it, hence the sigh. Apparently the old mill knew that it was all over. However it did not die in vain. The miller, Leon Leonard, salvaged enough to build a dwelling house nearby (now occupied by the Holden family).

Just across Grove Street (then called the '76 road) and upland and west a bit was an intriguing small cave in the limestone ledge. The fire-blackened overhang led us to believe that Indians once dwelt here. [Come on you archaeologists.]

Two more bright spots in our endless playground were Rocky and Muddy Ponds. The latter was a perfect specimen of a bog. It seems the whole area should be classed forever wild. In olden days many sheep, cattle and horses became mired in this bog, never to be seen again. Legend has it that on a still night the cries of these animals could be heard in Mill Village. What prehistoric animal remains may lie in this primal trap?

The nearby woods were then, and still are, a botanist's paradise of wild flowers: lady slippers, June pinks, pitcher plants. These and many other species we brought home to plant in our wild flower garden or to press and mount later.

Key to Map

RECOGNIZING AND IDENTIFYING OLD BUILDINGS OF MILL VILLAGE ON MAP

#1 – LEDGETT HOUSE

The house and barn floated away in the 1947 Flood. House lodged on the Post Road and was dismantled.

#2 – PREMO HOUSE

The house and barn burned in 1934 while owned by Arnold Rowe. A new house and barn were built on the same site and property is now owned by Robert and Wilma Moore (Moore's Auto).

#3 – RUSSELL HOUSE

The Russell house remained in the family until the mid-1950s. It was sold to Fancher, Smith and Hoag, two sisters and a brother. In 1965 it came back into the Russell family when Donald Russell's daughter Faye and her husband Earl Smith bought it. In 1987 it was sold to Robert and Wilma Moore and razed.

#4 – PROVO HOUSE

Presently the home of Barry and Margaret Smith. Barry operates a Saab and Foreign Car Repair business there.

#5 – FINTELL FARM

Farmland presently owned by Thomas Dairy. Barn and farmhouse were razed.

#6 – BUTTERFIELD HOUSE

This residence was destroyed by fire in the late 1960s.

#7 – THE MILL HOUSE

Presently a sales and showroom for Plaza Appliance Center.

#7 – GLEN MILL

The mill building toppled into the mill pond in May 1925. Salvaged timbers were used to construct the present home of Francis and Ruth Holden, very near to the exact site of the mill.

#8 – DYER HOUSE

Now the Farm and Home Appliance Center.

#9 – GIBSON HOUSE

Succumbed to neglect after being empty. Debris removed in late 1930s. Probably oldest structure shown on the map.

#10 – BLANCHARD HOUSE

The Blanchard family came to Mill Village in the late 1920s from Chittenden and were longtime residents. Earlier owners of the property were Leonards and Borahs. The present owners are Robert and Grace Kimmey.

#11 – WHEELER HOUSE

The Wheeler family also came to Mill Village from Chittenden in the late 1920s. They purchased their land and house from F. R. Patch who built Patch's Dam. The house and land have been in continuous ownership by a Wheeler family member ever since. It is presently the residence of Margaret Wheeler. Across the road on the former site of Clinton Wheeler's Blacksmith Shop is now Ted Hendee's Garage.

#12 – MILL VILLAGE SCHOOL

Closed as a school in 1949 and sold to Mrs. Phillip Quirk, who made it into a rental property.

#13 – BEEBE FARM

Now the home of Robert and Peg Dombro. Barns were torn down.

#14 – PROVO AND BOLDUC

This building which once housed a blacksmith and wagon shop was so battered by the Flood of 1947 that it was razed.

#15 – QUIRK FARM

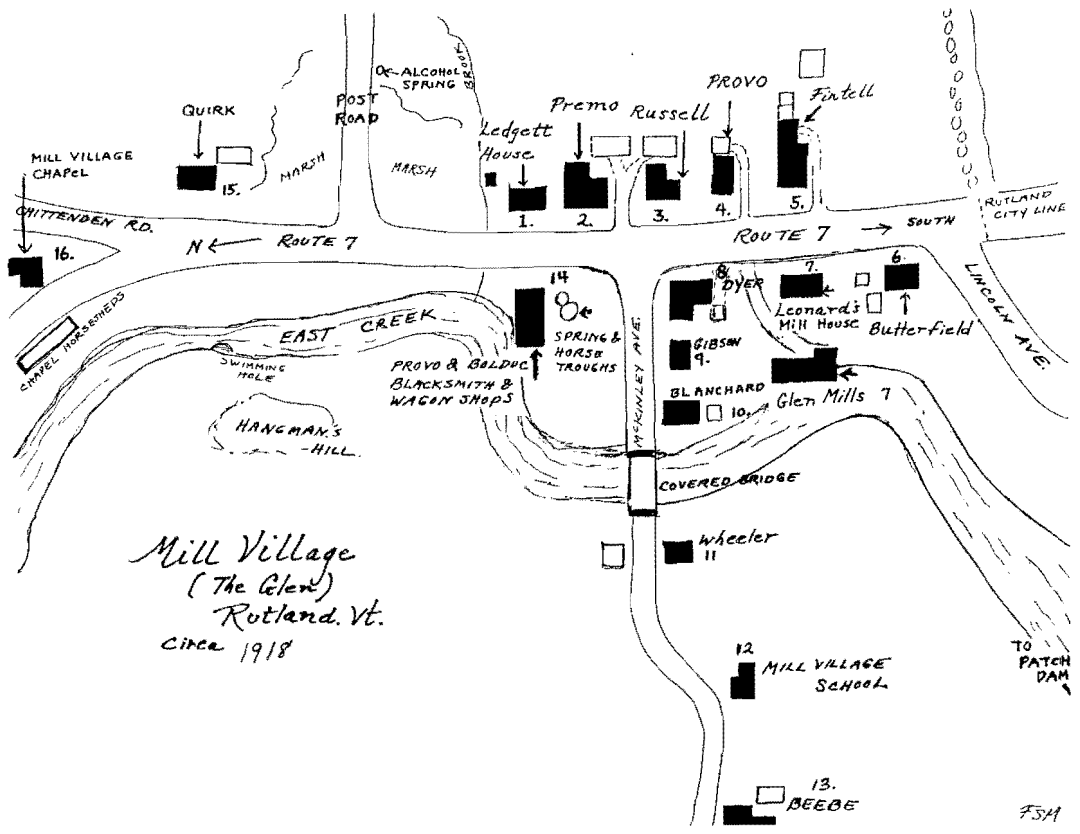
The Quirks sold their farm to Central Vermont Public Service Corp. and the house and barns were torn down. C.V.P.S. has a large office building there today.

#16 – MILL VILLAGE CHAPEL

Once located directly south of Ed's Country Store at the junction of Route 7 and Chittenden Road, the chapel was moved across the Chittenden Road to its new location. The horsesheds blew down in a gale in March 1931.

HANGMAN'S HILL (Unnumbered)

This unusual promontory with the questionable name was leveled and is now the site of the Vermont State Police Barracks, State Highway Department and Department of Motor Vehicles.



The Mills
(#7 on the map)

The grist and saw mills were located just south and west of home. My grandfather began operating these mills in 1872. The rumble of the stones grinding grist, and the whine of the saw were sweet music because they meant prosperity. The mill pond extended from the dam to the intersection of Post road and Route 7. Graced by huge willows here, and open pasture there, it was a thing of beauty, but a constant dread to parents whose first thought was *the pond* whenever a child became overdue. It was heaven for young and old disciples of Isaak Walton as it harbored a few trout and plenty of dase and suckers.



RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

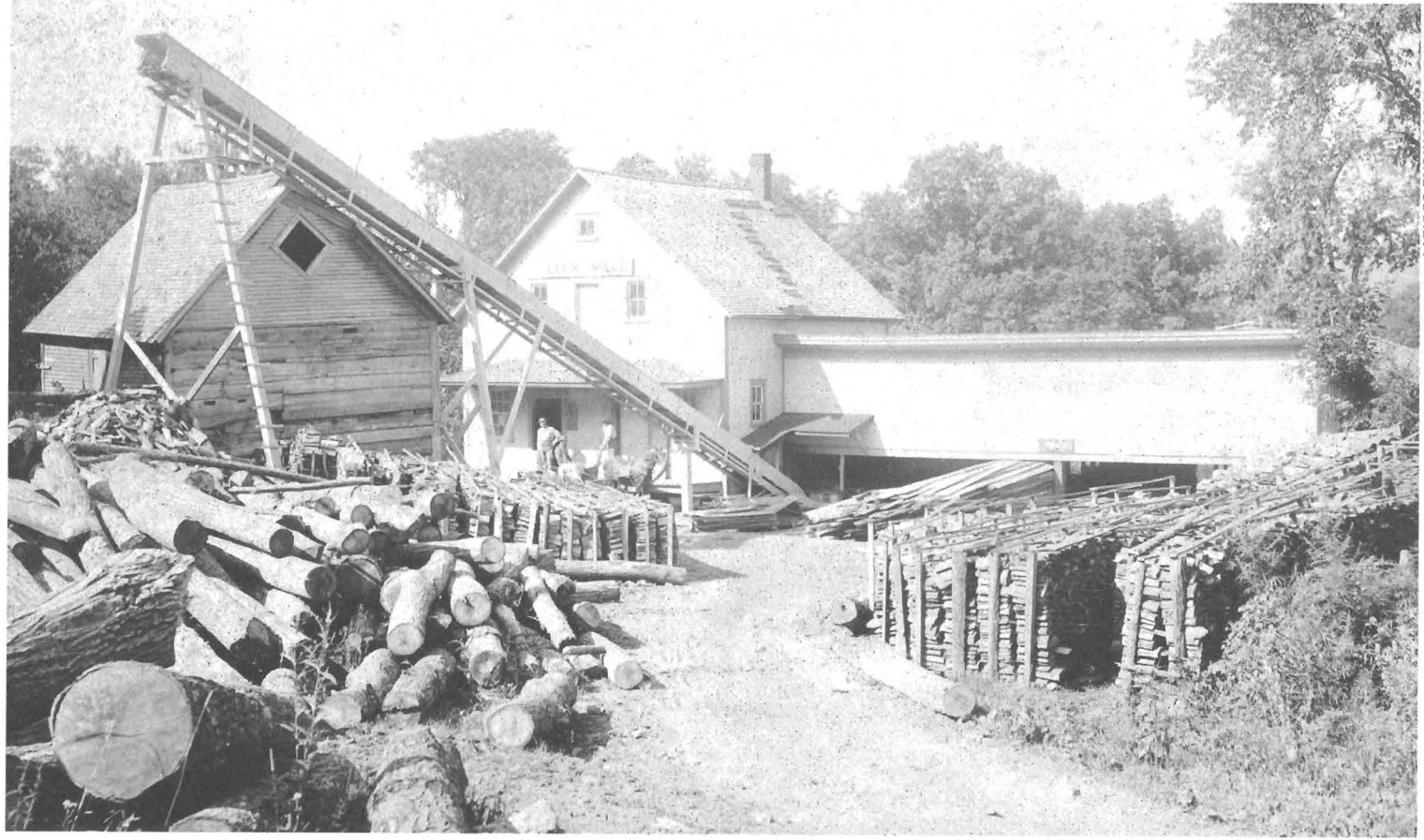
The mill buildings, mill pond and dam seen from the west side of East Creek (#7 on the map).



The busy mill in its heyday. It collapsed with a mighty sigh in 1925 (#7 on the map).



The home of the miller stood just above the mill which is seen at left (#7 on the map).



RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Another view of the mill which shows the saw mill portion of the operation (#7 on the map).

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Mill Village School

(#12 on the map)

The Mill Village School was a one-room affair heated by a woodstove in one corner. The seating arrangement placed the first grade nearest the stove and the ninth grade in the farthest corner. A local man, or sometimes a student, was hired by the school department to build a fire each morning to assure warmth by nine o'clock. His daily wage was twenty-five cents. Each morning a larger student was given the honor of going to the Beebe farm (#13 on the map) to fetch a pail of water which would last the day. No individual drinking cups were provided, just a tin dipper. During the winter if we had any pen and ink work to do such as the Palmer method of writing, it was necessary to wait until the ink wells had thawed out. At one time when the last chunk of wood had been used, the teacher appointed the three largest boys to go forth and scavenge some wood. The delegation, intoxicated with this bonanza of freedom, carried the venture as far as Muddy Pond, one mile distant, finally returning empty-handed. After a thorough cross-examination by the teacher the only alibi was: "We couldn't find the right kind of wood."

I can only recall one chimney fire. The fastest runner was dispatched to the village and soon returned with Fred Provo and Henry Bolduc who soon calmed the teacher and watched while the fire burned itself out. The next-to-last day of school was spent erasing all pencil marks in books and other tidying-up chores. The last day we all brought a lunch and walked to some sylvan spot for a picnic. This was the graduation exercise. There were nine grades (later eight) and never over 25 pupils at one time.

During the summer vacation we waged a relentless war on woodchucks as they were plentiful in the area. Surrounding farmers were glad to be rid of these pests since a valuable horse might break a leg stepping in one of their burrows, or a newly-sharpened set of knives (mowing machine) could be ruined by hitting the mounds of earth at a den site.

As our traps were too small, our father bought each of us a No. 3 Oneida jump. Morning, noon, and night we visited these traps, and one summer tacked forty-nine tails on the barn. Skunks raided hen houses and sweet corn and here again we endeared ourselves to the farmers since every boy eager to make a little money would try to trap a few. On frosty fall mornings wave after wave of the pungent odor would ripple over the countryside, each denoting another triumph for some schoolboy trapper.

A prime black skunk would fetch four dollars grading down to fifty cents for white, a lot of money those days. The odorless fat was "tried out" on the kitchen stove and the oil, noted for soothing and healing properties, sold to local druggists for around one dollar a quart.



MOULTON

Dressed in their Sunday best are the Russell boys, Donald (l) and younger brother Lawrence (r).

Mill Village Chapel

(#16 on the map)

The Mill Village Sunday School was another focal point of life in Mill Village. Here each Sunday everyone from kindergarten age to grandparents gathered, classes were held, hymns were sung and many life-long friendships started, some even ending in matrimony. Once or twice a year a preacher from Rutland came up and a full house resulted.

The annual Christmas exercises were the high social event of any year. Each Sunday before this event names were drawn to ensure that everyone would receive a present. Needless to say attendance was very good. At the Christmas celebration the climax came with the arrival of Santa Claus, who told a long story of his trip interwoven with incidents involving the local citizenry. Many of these tales "brought down the house". The monthly chapel supper brought many neighbors together who met each other only on this occasion. This supper has withstood the ravages of time and is to this day an important event each month.



MOULTON

The Mill Village Chapel in its original location at the junction of Route 7 and Chittenden Road (#16 on the map).

Billy Lampkins and his Popcorn Wagon

Every now and then a pleasant aroma recalls an event (almost lost in the mists of memory) that highlighted the summer calm—the arrival of a horse-drawn popcorn wagon. The wagon was a replica of the milk wagons of yesteryear with a gas-fired popcorn machine inside the glass-enclosed interior. The impressive vehicle was presided over by a beaming black man known as Billy Lampkins. The arrival of this sparkling white vehicle was announced by the ringing of the handbell which drowned out the ringing of the anvil in the nearby blacksmith shop. This new sound reached an amazing number of ears and in a short time Billy did a fine business passing out little paper bags of his product generously buttered with the natural dairy butter of those days which added a flavor unknown to modern youth.

Today

As I write this on March 26, 1992, "What is left"? Home, after two hundred years of existence, was smashed into kindling wood and carted to a landfill. The land it occupied was covered with blacktop, storage for new and used cars.

In 1931 a cement road was laid from Brandon to Rutland. The rumble of the mill and whine of the saw have been supplanted by the constant roar of traffic.

The Glen, and in fact the whole pond, was filled with mud by the great 1947 Flood and the entire pond is now a giant puddle. The building housing the blacksmith and wheelwright shops was so damaged by the flood that it was condemned and razed. The covered bridge was swept away at the same time.

The spring has been piped underground into what is left of the pond. A pitiful puddle is all that is left of the marsh which also filled with sediment from the flood. The schoolhouse has been transformed into a modern home by the Quirk family.

About the only vestige of yesteryear is the Mill Village Chapel. It stands like a lonely sentinel. But the warp and weave, the spirit of Mill Village, lives on. The monthly chapel suppers are well attended by stalwart defenders of a neighborliness and community fabric which has withstood the acid test of time.

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The editors wish to thank Faye Moulton for her valuable assistance in compiling this Quarterly.

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
96 CENTER STREET, RUTLAND, VERMONT 05701-4023
(802) 775-2006

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Rutland, VT 05701-4023

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Co-Editors: James S. Davidson and Elaine G. Purdy
Managing Editor: Elaine G. Purdy

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ISSN 0748-2493

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